

Sermon: The Promise Fulfilled by Pentecost

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

Scriptures: Joel 2: 21-32 Acts 2: 1-21 John 15: 9-12, 26-27

Summary: The context of Joel's prophecy regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit is perhaps the most precious promise in the Bible.

Pentecost was already a popular festival; so, Jerusalem was packed. We've heard how, during this festival, the disciples were hiding in an upper room, worshipping God, but keeping a low profile out of fear. The Holy Spirit so empowered them that they ran out into the crowded street, praising God. This gift of courage included an ability to speak in the native languages of the crowd. We have heard how some supposed the disciples to be drunk, and how Peter explained that this was the fulfillment of what the prophet, Joel, had already spoken about.

Today, I want to talk about the context of Joel's prophecy. It was in the middle of the devastating Babylonian captivity. A whole generation had lost their heritage and many Jews had not even seen

the rubble left of the Temple in Jerusalem. For many Jews, it was as if the locusts had swarmed in waves and eaten up their years along with their crops. Nothing seemed left and people had no hope.

It was then that Joel prophesied the coming of God's Holy Spirit, a gift to transform and reshape the nation. But before this prophecy, Joel said God would act because God planned to restore to them the years the locusts had eaten!

That had to ring a major bell for Peter and the other disciples. They had followed Jesus and been his intimate friends and students for three years. He was the Messiah, but society, both Jewish and Roman, had killed Him. They knew Jesus was risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven, but they were still afraid for themselves and were hiding out to worship privately.

To them, it must have felt like locusts had eaten those 3 years with the Son of God. Then, all at once, everything and everyone changed.

I, too, felt that the locusts had eaten my years. I, and many people like me, mourn a childhood we never had because we were too busy hiding, pretending, and meeting others' expectations. Also, there are those who look at their present infirmities, pain, and isolation, saying: "The locusts have eaten up all my years; now, my life is no longer valid. I have become an *invalid* invalid."

Whole churches can feel this way. "Our glory days of full pews and large groups of children are in the past," they say. "These are post-denominational years, and the locusts have eaten what came before us."

Another person who felt the way Joel described was Job. He lost health, wealth, and family. All Job had left were friends who couldn't think of anything better to say than that he must have somehow been to blame for his own wretched circumstances.

Job was right that he was not to blame, but he was wrong to fear God would leave him at a loss forever. The nation of Israel was wrong, the disciples were wrong, I was wrong, and anyone who has only fear and no hope is also wrong.

I prayed for God's help to live as a woman pleasing to Him. Those with illness or alone and shut in, pray that God will make their lives matter, and our church prays that we will witness and bless our entire community.

I am here to tell you that on this day, the day of Pentecost, God hears those prayers and has already acted, so that the years the locusts have eaten will be restored to us. Let's not be afraid or closeted away in our faith. God has sent the Holy Spirit today! Let's meet the future God gives us with the grace Heaven sends, and let's do it in Jesus' Name, Amen.